



Damning New Evidence Raises Concerns About Threats to New York's Water from Gas Drilling

By Byard Duncan, AlterNet

Posted on December 11, 2009, Printed on December 11, 2009

<http://www.alternet.org/story/144492/>

Shortly after Laurie Lytle and her husband purchased a home near Geneva, NY in September 2006, they noticed a yellow flier tucked in their door frame. Chesapeake Energy, one of the nation's largest developers of natural gas, had come knocking, wondering if the Lytles were interested in leasing their land for exploration. "Sign with Chesapeake Energy," Lytle recalled the flier saying: "We can give you money for not doing much."

Lytle threw it out. When she found an identical flier in the same spot a few days later, she threw that one out, too.

It wasn't long before Chesapeake ditched the paper and sent a representative to the Lytles' home -- a guy named Ivan. The amount of money he was willing to pay increased every time the couple voiced their doubts about drilling -- every time they told him his sum was "a joke." First it was \$289 for the lease. Then it was more. Then more. At the end of three weeks' negotiations, Chesapeake had upped its offer to approximately \$4,000, Lytle said.

"They really were pushing to get the deal done," she told me. "They really wanted us to sign."

The Lytles did eventually sign, on Feb. 7, 2007, with one contractual addendum: Were they to experience any problems with their drinking water, the responsibility would fall on Chesapeake to cover the damage. The company agreed, and for months no drilling took place. Then October came, cloudy and cold. Chesapeake finally began exploration, employing a technique called hydraulic fracturing (hydrofracking for short), which involves shooting millions of gallons of water and chemicals deep underground to break up rock formations and release natural gas. Just one day after the drilling started, Lytle noticed that something had gone wrong with her water quality.

"I went to go to the bathroom and the toilet water was gray," she said. "There was sediment in it."

She called Chesapeake, which told her to wait a few days for the hazy residue to clear. When it didn't, the company cut her a check for the "damages": \$273.17 for the installation of a depth filter, and \$150 to cover five months' rental of said depth filter. In total, Chesapeake dished out \$423.17. The Lytles' settlement was petite in its monetary value, but large in its political implications. New York has thus far not counted itself among the cluster of states (Alaska, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, Wyoming and Pennsylvania) to report cases of water contamination near fracking sites. According to the New York Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Web site, "The types of problems reported to have occurred in states without such strong environmental laws and rigorous regulations haven't happened here." This may no longer be the case.

Additionally, the Lytles' problem has significant repercussions for New York's exploitation of the Marcellus Shale, an enormous, goldfish-shaped rock formation that stretches from Syracuse to northern Tennessee and is believed to contain 500 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. A contentious issue, Marcellus drilling has already hit snags in Dimock, PA, where 14 families recently filed suit against Cabot Oil and Gas for allegedly contaminating their water; and in central New York, where anti-fracking signs adorn many front yards and drilling has been mired for months in a complex approval process.

This process (the state has completed a draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement, or dSGEIS, to determine whether or not hydrofracking in the Marcellus is safe) was most recently complicated by findings that allege decades of negligence on the part of New York's DEC. According to a November study conducted by Toxics Targeting, an Ithaca, NY-based environmental research company, there have been 270 cases of oil and gas spills in New York over the last 30 years -- 65 of which have yet to meet cleanup standards.

One incident, which occurred in Freedom, NY in 1999, involved equipment faults on a drill rig. In a matter of minutes, methane gas migrated more than 8,000 feet (the state only mandates that drills be 1,000 feet from a public water supply, or 150 feet from a private well), bubbling up in nearby ponds. It seeped through neighbors' fields. Twelve families had to be evacuated.

The DEC's record of another mishap -- this one from Dec. 16, 2002 -- pretty much speaks for itself:

BUCKEYE COAST PIPELINE Spill: 0270494, "THE PIPELINE BREAK OCCURRED BEHIND THE MAUER'S SHOP AT 9732 SNIPERY ROAD AND WAS ON A SLOPE. THE BRINE THEN FLOWED INTO AN AREA THAT LOOKS LIKE A HARD BOTTOM SWAMP. ALL THE TREES IN THIS AREA ARE DEAD. IT APPEARS THERE IS A COUPLE OF ACRES KILLED; ALL THE TREES ARE STILL DEAD IN THIS AREA, BUT THE GRASSES AND SHALLOW ROOTED VEGETATION IS COMING BACK ALL ACROSS THE IMPACTED AREA. PB ENERGY HAS TAKEN OVER OWNERSHIP OF THE PIPELINE AND WILL WORK OUT A SETTLEMENT WITH BOTH PROPERTY OWNERS. THEY MAY TRY PLANTING SOME SALT RESISTANT TREES IN THE SWAMP AREA.

The DEC has defended its existing standards, even in light of evidence from Walter Hang, president of Toxics Targeting. Less than 300 spills out of 300,000 potential incidents is a good percentage, said Dennis Harrar, chief of the department's emergency response spills unit. "In the scheme of things, this is not really a problem," he recently told a local paper. But Hang disagrees. Cases like these, he argues, illustrate serious problems with both the DEC and its template for Marcellus drilling.

On Dec. 9, Hang issued a petition to New York Governor David Paterson, urging him to completely scrap the state's dSGEIS. The letter, whose 6,061 signatories include Congressman Eric Massa, New York Assembly Representative Barbara Lifton and Ithaca Mayor Carolyn Peterson, calls on Paterson to go back to the drawing board: "The 'slickwater, horizontal drilling, hydrofracking' required to break up and release gas from the highly impermeable rock requires vast quantities of water and generates a wide array of toxic concerns," they argue.

"The largest problem is that [the sGEIS] is based on the assumption that the existing regulations adequately protect the public," Hang told me. "They don't."

"It's a complete theoretical model," he added. "It's an idealized model of what's supposed to happen."

One signature on Hang's petition came from Laurie Lytle, who has recently begun to worry that the filter Chesapeake helped install may not be catching some of the chemicals used in hydrofracking. Chesapeake tested her water in early 2008, but didn't disclose a complete list of its "proprietary" chemical ingredients. Lytle has been drinking her water for about two years now -- "a nice long time for those chemicals to be affecting my body and my family's bodies."

"I want to know what's in the water, and how it might be affecting my health and my property values," she said, holding a Chesapeake brochure that claims, "Property values can be positively correlated with production."

"I think I was misled in one respect."

Byard Duncan is a contributing writer and editor for AlterNet.

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THE STATE JOURNAL, 11 December 2009

Environmentalists Seek Greater Regulation for Marcellus Shale Drilling

By WALT WILLIAMS

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CHARLESTON — Showing pictures of huge natural gas well fields and a patch of forest left dead from well wastewater, an environmental advocate asked state lawmakers Dec. 7 to support increased regulations on drilling in the Marcellus shale.

Beth Little of the West Virginia Sierra Club told members of the state Joint Legislative

Oversight Commission on State Water Resources that state law has little to prevent some of the worst environmental consequences of gas drilling using a process known as hydrofracking.

“They need millions of gallons of water, and there are no restrictions on water withdrawal in West Virginia except you are not supposed to take so much water it kills the stream,” she said.

The commission is considering a proposed law that would create new reporting and permitting requirements for drilling along the Marcellus shale. Specifically, it would require the creation of rules regulating water withdrawal and the disposal of wastewater from drilling operations.

The commission hasn’t decided whether to take the bill before the full Legislature, and it won’t take up the issue until January. Industry representatives say the bill is unnecessary because the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection already has the authority to spell out conditions for approving permits.

They also say the gas industry has been an economic boon to the state. When production dropped off due to weakening gas prices the state saw declining tax revenues.

“(Less production) also means few good-paying jobs with benefits and the harsh reality facing families whose bread-winners were gainfully employed in the industry in West Virginia,” lobbyist Philip Reale stated in written testimony delivered to the commission.

The Marcellus shale is a huge natural gas formation lying primarily under West Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York. To extract the gas, drilling operators use a technique called hydrofracking where large quantities of water are injected into the formation to fracture the rock and release the gas.

Environmentalists say they have many concerns about hydrofracking. One concern is the large amount of water it requires and how the water use could impact nearby streams. Another concern focuses on how the water pulled from the wells is disposed of after the process is completed. The water, they say, is full of heavy metals and other pollutants.

Little showed lawmakers a picture of a patch of West Virginia forest that had been sprayed with a well wastewater. The vegetation in the foreground was dead, while the

vegetation in the distance, which had not been sprayed, was lush and green. The wastewater even killed mature trees, which were still rotting away at the site a year later, she said.

Little said Pennsylvania officials have complained about the high level of total dissolved in the Monongahela River as it leaves the state. West Virginia has no standards for the discharges of dissolved solids into streams.

She said a recent fish kill in Dunkard Creek in Monongalia County shows that the introduction of some pollutants has harmful effects on streams. State officials have not linked that even to gas drilling. The kill was caused by a toxic form of algae that was able to bloom thanks to high salinity levels in the water.

With that in mind, Little said the Sierra Club would like to see the state adopt standards for water withdrawals, total dissolved solids and well spacing. It also wants higher permit fees, more money set aside for DEP inspections, a requirement to use synthetic liners for wastewater ponds, documentation of where the wastewater is being taken and treated, and emergency plans for spills.

“(The proposed legislation) has got a couple things we would like to see, and I guess we are prepared to endorse that,” she said.

MARCELLUS-NATIONAL JOURNAL-5DecY2K9

NATIONAL JOURNAL 5 December 2009.

Check out <http://www.nationaljournal.com>

ISSUES & IDEAS

EPA, States Tangle On Hydraulic Fracturing

A CONTROVERSIAL METHOD OF EXTRACTING NATURAL GAS FUELS A DISPUTE OVER PROTECTING DRINKING WATER.

***Saturday, Dec. 5, 2009
by Margaret Kriz Hobson***

A controversial but potentially very lucrative way of extracting natural gas by forcefully shooting liquids into rock formations miles beneath the Earth's surface is triggering a battle over whether Washington or the states should be responsible for making sure the process is not allowed to taint drinking-water supplies.

Environmental advocates and local citizens groups warn that hydraulic fracturing -- so-called because the injected liquid cracks layers of rock to free up methane trapped in pockets -- has the potential to contaminate rivers and aquifers. These critics want Congress to give the Environmental Protection Agency authority to set minimum pollution-control standards for the high-tech mining method.

"[The states] don't monitor local groundwater or do sampling, so we really don't know if this process is safe," said Bruce Baizel, staff attorney for the oil and gas accountability project at Earthworks, a public-interest group. "The states are uneven in how they regulate," he said. "We need a baseline from the EPA."

In October, Congress instructed EPA to study the safety of hydraulic fracturing. The order, authored by Rep. Maurice Hinchey, D-N.Y., was included in an Interior appropriations bill that was signed into law. Reps. Hinchey and Diana DeGette, D-Colo., are pushing a bill to allow EPA to regulate the drilling technology under the Safe Drinking Water Act. Sens. Bob Casey, D-Pa., and Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., have introduced similar legislation.

The natural-gas industry and state officials oppose increasing federal oversight. They argue that EPA controls would cause energy prices to skyrocket, slow the development of natural-gas fields, and block enormous economic benefits.

Scott Kell, president of the Ground Water Protection Council, an association of state water regulators, told Congress in June that the states can handle environmental problems associated with hydraulic fracturing. "State regulations are designed to provide the level of water protection needed to assure water resources remain both viable and available," he said.

Yet in August, EPA reported that 11 of 39 drinking-water wells near a Wyoming hydraulic-fracturing operation were contaminated with chemicals used in the fracturing process. The next month, thousands of gallons of fracturing fluid spilled into a stream in Dimock, Pa., killing hundreds of fish.

The debate over regulation of hydraulic fracturing has intensified since the industry began tapping the Marcellus shale formation, a gigantic natural-gas field that stretches from New York through Pennsylvania and West Virginia and into Ohio, Maryland, and Virginia. In April, the Energy Department estimated that the Marcellus field contains 262 trillion cubic feet of extractable natural-gas reserves. With the United States now using about 23 TCF of natural gas a year, the Marcellus field could meet the nation's needs for a decade.

"It's a world-scale gas formation," said Lee Fuller, vice president for government relations at the Independent Petroleum Association of America. Fuller also heads Energy in Depth, an industry coalition that is fighting new regulations.

Hydraulic fracturing is already extracting gas from the Marcellus field in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. And the process is spreading rapidly. Just 257 such wells were drilled in Pennsylvania from 2005 through 2008. But this year, the state has issued 446 drilling permits and 1,632 exploration authorizations. New York has imposed a drilling moratorium until state regulations are issued. But natural-gas companies are already lining up there for drilling permits.

Getting natural gas out of the Marcellus field isn't easy. The formation is 1 to 2 miles underground. Gas company drillers must bore down to the shale and then angle the drill horizontally. To free the natural gas from pockets in the hard rock, drillers crack the shale by forcing massive quantities of a water-chemical mixture into it. Despite the complexity of hydraulic fracturing, it makes drilling for previously inaccessible gas profitable.

Critics charge that hydraulic fracturing can contaminate drinking-water supplies if the water injected into the ground migrates into aquifers when the rock is fractured. That water contains special "fracking fluids" made up of chemicals that many firms have refused to identify. The injected liquids also dislodge naturally occurring toxins, such as the carcinogens cadmium and benzene, which environmentalists say could seep into drinking-water supplies.

Once the rock is fractured, the chemical-laden water generally returns to the surface. In Texas, workers usually re-inject the contaminated fluids into stable rock beds. Many scientists say that the geological formations in much of the Northeast contain too many fissures to allow long-term underground storage of tainted liquids.

Initially, wastewater from Pennsylvania's hydraulic fracturing wells was diverted to nearby sewage-treatment plants. But those facilities are not equipped to remove the salts and other minerals suspended in the drilling water. As a result, local waterways ended up contaminated. Last summer, U.S. Steel and Allegheny Energy both discovered that high levels of drilling minerals in the Monongahela River were corroding their machinery. State regulators responded by limiting the amount of drilling wastewater that companies could pour into the river and by increasing the flow from upstream dams to dilute the contamination. More recently, the Pennsylvania Environmental Protection Department proposed comprehensive limits on wastewater discharges from natural-gas drillers.

Now concerns about the safety of hydraulic fracturing are reaching the courts. In early November, Earthjustice, a public-interest law firm, sued Pennsylvania to stop regulators from allowing a new sewage-treatment plant to discharge wastewater from natural-gas drilling into a nearby river without first checking the

water for toxic chemicals. And a southwestern Pennsylvania property owner is in court arguing that the chemicals used at one hydraulic fracturing project ruined his land.

Opposition to the drilling operations is growing in Pennsylvania and New York, where neighborhood groups are working with local and national environmental organizations to push for strict protection measures. This fall, public protests in New York state caused Chesapeake Energy to back away from proposals to develop natural-gas fields in parts of the state from which New York City draws its drinking water. Although Chesapeake officials promised not to drill in those areas, city officials want state regulators to ban such development.

Drilling supporters argue that the activists' safety concerns are unfounded and could jeopardize economic revitalization. Industry officials say that Pennsylvania and New York residents are particularly sensitive about local drilling proposals because their states have not been home to major oil or gas development in a century.

"This is a community that's not all that familiar with the industry, compared with Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas, where the other natural-gas plays are located," said the petroleum association's Fuller. "That's allowing a lot of people to create negative imagery of the industry and raise issues about the safety of fracturing." The industry is fighting back with massive public-relations campaigns and coordinated lobbying efforts against the lawmakers who support increased federal regulation.

State regulators and industry lobbyists say that the safety questions should have been put to rest in 2004 when the Bush administration released a report concluding that hydraulic drilling "poses little or no threat" to drinking-water supplies. In 2005, because of that report, Congress barred EPA from policing the gas-extraction process. Critics, however, say that the study was flawed. "They conducted an initial literature search and solicited anecdotal comments," said Baizel of Earthworks. "There was supposed to be a phase two study that actually examined the industry practices. But that was never conducted."

Kelvin Gregory, assistant professor for civil and environmental engineering at Carnegie Mellon University, said that the disagreements are becoming increasingly vitriolic. "The banter on both sides is unhealthy," he said. "They're whipping rocks at each other from across the parking lot. There is a need for independent and objective science to put the hyperbole to rest."

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SRBC Ready to Start Up Real-Time Water Quality Monitoring Network for Small Streams in Early 2010

HARRISBURG (Dec. 10) — The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) today announced it will begin in early 2010 installing a monitoring network that will continuously measure and report water quality conditions of smaller rivers and streams located in northern tier Pennsylvania and southern tier New York.

SRBC will receive the data collected by the network and will make it available to other resource agencies and the public through its Web site. The data will help agency officials track existing water quality conditions and any changes in them on an ongoing, real-time basis.

“With the current concerns about the natural gas drilling activities occurring in the Susquehanna basin, SRBC believes that a data collection effort is critically important as the basis for making future decisions,” SRBC Executive Director Paul Swartz said.

This week, East Resources Inc., a natural gas company based in Warrendale, Pa., announced it will be contributing \$750,000 to SRBC for the water quality monitoring network.

Swartz said, “The commission truly appreciates this substantial contribution from East Resources. It will allow us to cover the

cost of installing the initial monitoring stations in the targeted areas. With this contribution, the commission has now secured a commitment of the financial resources needed to proceed with the project sooner than planned. If winter weather cooperates, we could begin installing equipment as soon as January 2010.”

SRBC will initially set up 30 water quality monitoring stations in the regions where drilling in the Marcellus shale is most active, as well as other locations where no drilling activities are planned so SRBC can collect control-data. The monitoring network will provide constant data collection with instruments sensitive enough to detect subtle changes in water quality on a frequency that will allow background conditions and any changes to them to be documented throughout the year. This level of data collection would not be feasible without the use of advanced technology.

Each of the monitoring stations will be equipped with water quality sensors and a transmitter to continuously monitor and report water temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, conductance (ability to conduct electricity) and turbidity (water clarity). The water depth also will be recorded to establish a relationship with stream flows. The monitoring of conductance is key to detecting impacts associated with natural gas activities if they occur; this constituent in water produced by the natural gas industry is generally 200 times greater than normally measured in streams in the Susquehanna River Basin, allowing it to be a leading indicator.

The monitoring network will provide early warnings to help environmental protection officials respond more rapidly and better pinpoint causes if water quality conditions change. It will also help local public water suppliers, local watershed groups and communities stay informed.

“The commission’s overarching objective of this monitoring network is to apply good science in order to track changes in water quality conditions over time and to allow for timely responses in the case of pollution events,” Swartz said. “The commission will rely on the know-how and expertise it has gained through an existing early warning system program and nearly 24 years of continuous monitoring to ensure the successful set up and operation of this expanded remote monitoring effort.”

Other objectives are to reduce the cost of data collection by using advanced technologies, form partnerships, enhance water supply protection through source water monitoring and be responsive to public concerns.

SRBC has already reached out to local government officials, colleges and universities along with watershed organizations to gauge their interest in assisting SRBC staff on the project.

For more information on SRBC’s proposed water quality monitoring network, go to SRBC’s web site at www.srbc.net/programs/remotenetwork.htm. This Web page contains a project information sheet, power point presentations and other information.

BELOW IS BIT MESSY, but is a site you may wish to subscribe to:

----- Original Message -----

From: <cog-request@lists.earthworksaction.org>

To: <cog@lists.earthworksaction.org>

Sent: Friday, December 11, 2009 12:18 PM

Subject: COG Digest, Vol 10, Issue 73

> Send COG mailing list submissions to

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> When replying, please edit your Subject line so it is more specific

> than "Re: Contents of COG digest..."

>

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> Today's Topics:

>

> 1. FW: Heartbreaking Stories Warn New Yorkers of the Dangers in

> Store if the State OKs Destructive & Polluting "Marcellus Shale"

> Gas Drilling, 20091211 (Deborah Goldberg)

>

>

> -----

>

> Message: 1

> Date: Fri, 11 Dec 2009 09:18:45 -0800

> From: Deborah Goldberg <dgoldberg@earthjustice.org>

> Subject: [COG] FW: Heartbreaking Stories Warn New Yorkers of the

> Dangers in Store if the State OKs Destructive & Polluting "Marcellus

> Shale" Gas Drilling, 20091211

> To: "'ccwoilandgas@yahoogroups.com'" <ccwoilandgas@yahoogroups.com>, <cog@lists.earthworksaction.org>, NY

> Coalition <natural-gas-working-group@googlegroups.com>

> Message-ID:

> <B9D8378EDD2FE749AB34CFEDB25F80EA82022906E9@oak-ex07mail.EARTHJUSTICE.LOCAL>

>

> Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

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> Heartbreaking Stories Warn New Yorkers of What May Be in Store if the State OKs Controversial Gas Drilling

>

> By Maura Stephens, AlterNet

> December 11, 2009

> <http://www.alternet.org/story/144498/>

>

> I live and work in Marcellus

shale<[http://www.alternet.org/water/143719/water%2C forests and farms in new york state threatened by oil and gas](http://www.alternet.org/water/143719/water%2C%20forests%20and%20farms%20in%20new%20york%20state%20threatened%20by%20oil%20and%20gas)

drilling/> ground zero -- central New York State, just south of the Finger Lakes, one of the biggest and best watersheds in the hemisphere. My home is in economically challenged, mostly rural Tioga County<http://www.naco.org/Template.cfm?Section=Find_a_County&Template=/cffiles/counties/county.cfm&id=36107>, and I work in Tompkins County<http://www.naco.org/Template.cfm?Section=Find_a_County&Template=/cffiles/counties/county.cfm&id=36109>. Almost all our neighbors for several miles around have signed gas leases. I participate regularly and actively as a client, colleague, patient, or volunteer with businesses, organizations, and institutions in 19 other New York counties.

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> I have been economically poor and landless, economically comfortable and landless, comfortable and landed, and poor and landed. I've been rural, suburban, and urban. And I've spent most of my adult life paying state and local taxes in New York State (and a whole lot of national taxes, most of which have gone toward things I do not condone). I am a farmer, writer, editor, actor, and educator. My spouse, who was laid off a couple years ago and has been underemployed and looking for work ever since, and I struggle to make ends meet. Yet we love this part of the world and have been glad to call it home. This is all by way of showing we are stakeholders in this region, dubbed "Marcellus shale" for the natural gas reserves hidden underground. Because we care a whole lot and wanted to learn firsthand, my spouse and I recently traveled around West Virginia and Pennsylvania, talking to people whose lives have been affected by the same sort of hydrofracturing<http://www.alternet.org/water/144345/what_the_frack_poisoning_our_water_in_the_name_of_energy_profits> (or "fracking"), a technique used in drilling for natural gas that is likely to soon take place in New York State.

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> Most of these Pennsylvanians told us they rue the day they signed the gas leases. Some of them "inherited" gas leases -- or bought property on which there was a mineral rights lease they were unaware of -- and now are paying the consequences.

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> Their stories were heartbreaking. This is some of what they told us, including several things not mentioned in other articles I've read about fracking:

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> 1) There is no longer any privacy on their own property. Posted signs are a thing of the past; there's no way to guarantee that anyone would pay attention to them. The gas drillers have access to leased land 24/7, 365 days a year, because there is always something to deal with on a gas pad. The land owners no longer have privacy or the ability to walk at will on their own property. One woman told us she and her teenage daughter feel like prisoners in their home. They used to walk around in bathing suits or pajamas in the privacy of their 100-plus-acre farm. That's no longer an option -- they stay inside with the blinds drawn even on nice days because they never know when and where a stranger will be walking around the property.

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> 2) The gas companies can pretty much do as they please. There is no consultation with the landowners about placement or size of the pads, or the numerous roads that have to be cut into the property, or drainage fields, or pond sites, or planned building sites. One farmer, who had dreamed of this since his elder son's birth in 1983, gave his son and new daughter-in-law three acres on which to build a house, on a lovely corner of his farm. The newlyweds were just about to begin building the home they'd designed when the gas company decided to drill on the very same spot. The family had no way of fighting the gas company, which refused to change its drilling location. The young man and his bride were forced to rent an apartment in town. Subsequently the drilling contaminated the well that provided drinking water to the family and farm animals. And although the site did not yield gas, the land is no longer usable for farming or placing a home. The farmer, incidentally, had bought the land in the early 1980s without realizing a gas company held mineral rights to it via a 1920s lien.

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> 3) The gas companies do not respect the land. The gas companies have in numerous documented cases torn out mature stands of trees -- 20, 30, 60, 80 years old -- leaving the tree carcasses scattered about the land. "These guys just don't care," one landowner told us, close to tears. "They treated my farm like a garbage dump. They moved their bowels in the woods and left their filthy toilet paper behind. They threw all their rubbish around -- plastic bottles, McDonald's bags, you name it. I used to always kept this place manicured. It's been my pride and joy. But now, it's a rubbish heap. I'm still finding junk they left around, long after the fracking ended."

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> 4) There's light and noise nonstop. "No amount of money can buy you sufficient sleep," said a farmer. "It's bright and loud, all the time. Not that I'd sleep anyway. All I do is worry about the land and the water and what we are going to do."

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> 5) Their property has lost its value. "We can't drink our water," said the same farmer. "We can't reclaim the land. They're putting my farm out of business. The land is worthless. Nobody would want it, like this."

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> 6) They can no longer fish in their streams and ponds. So many of these waterways have been poisoned by fracking waste,

runoff, spillage, or dumping, that fishers are afraid to eat the fish they catch. One farmer, who told us he'd planned to stock his farm pond with seven varieties of fish that he would raise and sell to other landowners, has lost this income stream because his pond was polluted by fracking.

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> 7) The water is dangerously unsafe. "A primary reason we chose to live in this area," says a woman from central New York, "is that it has abundant clean water. The western half or two-thirds of the United States, and the Southeast -- the entire rest of the country -- has precious little water. But we have always had plenty of fresh, safe, available water. Now we are threatened with gas fracturing, or 'fracking.' The contaminants released in the fracking process are carcinogenic (cancer-inducing) and even radioactive. Everyone around here depends on our wells for safe drinking water. Now how can we ever drink our water again? City water is no safer."

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> The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) identified at least 14 different petroleum distillates used or proposed for use in New York fracking. Research done by the nonprofit Environmental Working Group, which monitors the safety of public health and the environment, demonstrates that petroleum distillates can contain benzene, a known carcinogen, as well as toluene, ethylbenzene, xylene, and other dangerous chemicals. The EPA says that all of these substances are toxic in water at very low levels.

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> An article in the Ithaca Journal said that, "Radioactive waste from the Marcellus is an issue state regulators will have to anticipate as they draft new rules for tapping the massive natural gas field under the Southern Tier. An analysis of wastewater samples by the Department of Health found levels of radium-226, and related alpha and beta radiation that are up to 10,000 times higher than drinking water standards, according to a memo the agency sent to the Department of Environmental Conservation."

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> We've spoken to farmers who had their drinking water analyzed and found some of these toxic chemicals in it. No wonder they will not drink the water from their own wells, or allow their children to do so. The levels of benzene, a petroleum distillate, to be used in hydrofracking in New York, per the DEC's draft supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (dsGEIS), range from 140,000 times the levels deemed "safe" by the EPA to 18.6 million times the safe level. Thus, as Environmental Working Group points out, "if 800 gallons of petroleum distillate were to contaminate a water supply, "depending on the benzene concentration, it would likely take somewhere between 112 million gallons (800 X 140,000) and 14.9 billion gallons (800 X 18.6 million) of water to dilute the benzene to EPA's safe level. If 6,400 gallons of petroleum distillate were to contaminate a water supply, it would likely take somewhere between 896 million and 119 billion gallons of water to dilute the benzene to EPA's safe levels." Where would all this water come from? And where would the contaminated billions of gallons of water be disposed? There simply is no good answer to either question.

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> 8) There is no transparency by the gas corporations. In 2006 Republican-led Congress removed hydraulic fracturing from any regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, and since 1980 many thousands of wells have been exempted from the Clean Air Act, which limits emissions of more than 180 toxic pollutants, many of which are emitted by gas companies. The gas companies managed in 1988 to get exemptions from the 1976 Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), which established a cradle-to-grave hazardous waste management program, as well. Last spring, with a new Congress, the energy industry launched a concerted lobbying effort to fight proposed tightening of federal oversight, claiming that any changes in the exemptions would mean loss of jobs and lower tax revenues.

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> There are other laws from which gas companies are largely exempt: The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), which holds most other industries accountable for cleaning up hazardous waste (this is the law that created the so-called "Superfund" to be used to clean up contaminated sites; the fund was initially financed via taxes on the chemical and petroleum industries, but Congress abandoned those taxes and now pays for these cleanups out of general funds. Thus the fund is too small to meet cleanup needs. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, 1969), which shifts to the public the burden of proof that activities by certain oil and gas drilling companies are unsafe.

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> Out West, a doctor trying to save the life of a nurse who'd come in contact with the clothing of a gas-fracking worker tried to get a list of the chemicals so he'd be able to pinpoint what had made her ill. The company that made the fluid refused to identify it, citing trade secrets. Even in the face of imminent death to someone contaminated by their chemical witches' brew, the gas corporations show their true colors: The bottom line is all that matters. Our health and the health of our families come in a distant second, and our environment -- our air, water, soil, and surroundings -- do not matter in the least. Why do gas companies (a) refuse to divulge the chemical contents of their materials and (b) fight to gain and keep exemptions from health- and environmental-protection bills?

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> In the last couple of months, around Dimock, Pennsylvania, Cabot Oil and Gas<http://www.alternet.org/water/144299/pennsylvania_residents_sue_gas_driller_for_contamination%2C_health_concerns/>, one of the fracking companies, has caused numerous spills and contamination of water wells and waterways. A court ordered Cabot to pay several fines for these transgressions. But the fines amount to just a couple hundred thousand dollars -- pennies to a corporation that stands to gain billions from its fracking operations. Fifteen brave Dimock families are suing Cabot<http://www.alternet.org/environment/144162/cabot_oil_and_gas_faces_lawsuit_in_marcellus_drilling> for ruining their water and posing a threat to their health.)

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> 9.) The tension between neighbors -- those who have signed a lease and are sticking with it and those who have either signed and regretted it or never signed -- is ugly. One landowner, the only one in a long row along a rural road in Tioga County, New York, has been threatened and shunned by neighbors because his holding out caused the gas companies to build their pipeline around his and neighbors' land. This meant the neighbors could not collect any royalty fees from the gas companies -- the incentive that, despite the dangers, excites so many lease signers.

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> 10) The tension within families is palpable as well. "My whole family is ready to commit me," a Pennsylvania man, the father of two young children, told us. "It's gotten so I don't trust anyone anymore. These gas companies lie, the DEP lies, the state lies, everyone lies. I used to be a trusting kind of person. Not anymore. And I'm so tense, I never sleep. This place was our dream, and now it's just about worthless. It's eating me up, and my wife is losing patience with me. I don't blame her. All I can do is fight to make sure this doesn't happen to other families. Otherwise I couldn't live with myself." On so many fronts, this practice of hydrofracking is simply too dangerous to pursue. We can live without the natural gas.

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> Contrary to corporate spin (even progressive radio host Stephanie Miller has been touting it), natural gas is not a clean alternative to coal and oil. It is also neither renewable nor sustainable. The reserves in the Marcellus shale will last only a few years at best, but the damage done to the environment and to our health will last for decades, even generations. Extracting it is just too dangerous. So let's do something else. We've got to pump up our activism on this front. We cannot allow gas and oil companies to dictate that we drink poison and allow our homes, property, landscapes, and health to be ruined. Let's get those gas companies and all their thousands of employees to focus their energy and resources on finding a truly sustainable, truly clean energy source, and developing affordable ways to bring it to millions.

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> Many of us are already committed to eliminating the overuse of energy in our daily lives and in our workplaces. Together we can create a sustainable energy infrastructure based on renewable, truly clean energy sources -- solar, wind, geothermal, and possibly biofuels. Together we can keep our water, farms, forests, fields, vineyards, streams, waterfalls, lakes, creeks, ponds, soil, rolling hills, small towns, quaint villages, and precious way of life safe and unspoiled so that our children, their children, and future generations will be able to breathe the air and drink the water without fear. We've made a lot of mistakes, for which our children and grandchildren and future generations will be paying the price. They deserve a better world, not a depleted, ugly, frightening one. Please, please, let's not screw this up, too.

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> Join thousands of other individuals, elected officials, entrepreneurs, institutions, and organizations in signing a coalition letter <http://www.toxicstargeting.com/MarcellusShale/coalition_letter> to New York Governor David Paterson asking him to ban hydrofracturing gas drilling in New York State. Hurry -- the deadline for public comment on the Department of Environmental Conservation's draft supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement is December 31, 2009.

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> Writer Maura Stephens lives in the hills outside Spencer, New York. She wrote this using voice recognition software.

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